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ABSTRACT

Discourse analysis, a field that reflects an interest in language as text and social interaction, is discussed. Discourse analysis deals with the way language varies from one communicative situation to another; textological analysis deals with the internal organization of such discourse in terms of grammar and vocabulary. Assumptions in contrastive textology are presented. An area of focus is the problem of whether and how certain categories of texts correlate with certain skills that learners should acquire. Different orientations concerning translation in language teaching are the classical model, the reform movement, the audiolingual method, the cognitive code, and the eclectic approach. (SW)

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DISCOURSE ANALYSIS FOR LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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Contrastive Discourse Analysis

When you are concerned, as I am, with building bridges between theoretical and applied linguistics, you can't help noticing a strange paradox: the more linguistic knowledge or theory one applies to the solution of a practical language problem, the more artificial and cumbersome the process can get (two obvious examples are language laboratory drills and bilingual dictionaries). I suspect that one explanation of this paradox lies in the type of knowledge that one brings to bear: there is a puzzling timelag between a theoretical idea and its practical testing out; by the time the knowledge enters general linguistic folklore it tends to get superseded by a new theory.

The trouble with applied linguistics is that it needs not just one set of theories, but the knowledge assembled in several different fields. Linguists in Australia (and elsewhere) tend to react to these difficulties in a number of more or less predictable ways, with good will and optimism, with less faith than scepticism, or even with abstinent cynicism.

But I remain hopeful. You have here in Australia a wonderful applied linguistic workshop in the field, which should be allowed to produce new materials and methods, e.g., out of the interaction of schemes for Bilinguals and schemes for Aboriginal education, or out of the tension between the decline in European and the rise of Asian and Oceanic languages.

Let me begin by illustrating a few basic notions from 'discourse analysis', a field which reflects our new interest in language as text and social interaction. Look at the following passage and try to decide what it is about.

(A): *(1) "A dramatic announcement from the White House this afternoon." (2) Mr. Osborne cheered up a little. (3) "I have completed the most important part of this task. (4) The next stage is one of analysis. (5) Here as in other spheres of life a realistic appraisal of the situation is preferable to the superimposition of an ideal state."*

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I can't blame you if you tell me that you don't know. There is perhaps a vague 'political' feel about the passage; perhaps you are assuming that this character Osborne is listening to a speech on the radio, or something like that? In fact, I have been misleading you: this isn't really a complete text, but a sequence of individual sentences taken from completely different sources:

This is a modified version of a paper read in April 1977 to the Society for Linguistics in Education at Melbourne.

(1) is from a radio broadcast which introduces the news about President Ford's pardon for ex-president Nixon (which I heard on the BBC in 1975);

(2) comes from a detective story by Agatha Christie;

(3) is taken from a speech by Winston Churchill to the House of Commons, reporting the formation of a new government at the start of the war with Germany in 1940;

(4) is part of a newspaper article on weather forecasting by computer (The Times, 1965);

(5) is from a book on language contact by a well-known Melbourne linguist (Michael Clyne 1972).

The reason why you trusted me was not only the sociological fact that one tends to believe what a lecturer says, but also that there were enough discourse signals in the piece to make it look like a coherent text, e.g. the quotation marks (which I added), the 'headline' character of sentence (1), the possible identification of the 1st person pronoun in sentence (3) with the origin of the announcement mentioned in sentence (1), the implied reference from the beginning of the *task* in (3) to its *next stage* in (4), and the semantic link between *analysis* in (4) and *appraisal* in (5).

The important point of this exercise is to stress something of which you are already intuitively aware: that language is organised in the form of textual discourse rather than as sequences of words, phrases, and sentences. Each of the full texts from which the sentences (1) to (5) were extracted has its own situational context and its own internal grammatical and lexical cohesion. (If I told you more about the situation of each of the original sources you could probably constitute your own versions of them.) Discourse analysis deals with the way language varies from one communicative situation to another, and textological analysis deals with the internal organisation of such discourses in terms of grammar and vocabulary. Or, as I formulated it in the first two maxims in the following lists, language is interaction in situations and discourse is patterned in texts.

(B): Assumptions in contrastive textology:

(1) Language is interaction in situations (discourse analysis).

(2) Discourse is patterned in texts (textological analysis).

(3) Situations influence text types (stylistic analysis).

(4) Bilingualism mediates between languages (contact analysis).

(5) Comparison must be at the text level (contrastive analysis).

(6) L1/L2 learning is textual approximation (error analysis).

(7) Intentions determine composition (rhetorical analysis).

(8) Knowledge determines comprehension (LSP analysis).

One of the most disastrous developments in linguistics since Saussure has been the almost total neglect of the two central elements, text and context, and only relatively recent work in anthropological linguistics, stylistics, and sociolinguistics has been able to undo some of the damage. The first three points in the above list remind us of the instrumental nature of language, the internal cohesive patterning of chunks of language, and the situational conditioning of different varieties of texts. If we move further along the list, we note certain statements about similarities and contrasts between pairs of languages. Having acknowledged that discourse is structured in certain ways in certain communicative situations, we naturally want to know whether the textological conventions differ from language to language.

But rather than making crude comparisons between languages in terms of formal units, e.g. stop consonants in English and French, or case marking in German and Russian, or kinship terms in Japanese and Indonesian, we should be looking at the "differences in the way connected discourse is organized and the way that organization is signalled to the hearer or reader" [Gleason 1968: 58]. Such comparison must be done at the level of the text, not that of the sentence or the word. This is point 5 on the list. Points 4 and 6 deal with types of interaction or contact between languages.

This is an area where the sociolinguistic study of borrowing and pidginisation and the psycholinguistic study of switching and language acquisition can help. Just as there are *within* languages a whole range of dialectal and stylistic varieties which we can quite happily accommodate as speakers, it is argued that there are no hard and fast barriers *between* languages; rather we should think of gradual transitions and approximations mediated by various degrees of bilingualism. So it is claimed (a very interesting hypothesis) that interlingual contact and intralingual variation can be regarded as extensions of the ability of any communicating human being to shift between codes when the situation requires it. For language learning this would have the important implication that we must encourage flexibility in discourse rather than insist on uniform standards of usage. (A radical proposal? Perhaps.) The last two items, 7 and 8, follow in part from what I have said so far. We now know from case studies of how language works as discourse, e.g., the analysis of teacher-pupil interaction by Sinclair and Coulthard [1975], that there is a wide range of functions and purposes that can be expressed in our communicative acts. Traditional rhetoric singled out some of these in terms of persuasive oratory, but there are many more intentions that determine our speech than merely the conviction of others. We also want to apologise, complain, mock, test, instruct, promise, query, tease as well as inform. The speaker must know how to encode these intentions, and the hearer must know how to decode them. One factor that is often ignored is the part that non-linguistic knowledge plays in discourse, which is particularly relevant to the comprehension process. Physical perception, interest and subject-matter knowledge precede and determine textual understanding. These considerations are very prominent in the teaching of 'languages for special purposes', a subject to which we shall turn in a moment.

The good teacher has probably always paid attention to these principles. The good teacher is aware of the reality of textual diversity and rightly suspicious of the linguist's attempts to reduce the complexities of discourse to an arbitrary 'basic vocabulary' or a 'grammatical core' (linguists can always defend themselves by claiming that this is linguistic folklore based on yesterday's knowledge).

There cannot be an absolute lexical or grammatical core, but only a more or less limited inventory of strategies which enable the speaker and learner to encode and decode specific texts in specific situations. Communication is the ability to understand and produce meaningful texts, not merely to manipulate isolated elements in artificial practice conditions.

The existing learning materials do not always help in this respect (I sometimes ask myself whether they deserve the title text-book). Item (C) gives two examples of textless and contextless exercises from German courses published during the last 15 years. The first exercise which is used in the teaching of the prestigious Goethe Institute follows an excruciatingly artificial and boring passage about all the things that electricity can and allows us to do, so presumably the student is supposed to remember and construct pseudo-utterances like *wash/wash laundry / washing machine, clean/clean teeth/cleaning machine (?), milk/milk cows/milking machine (?)* No further instructions are provided.

(C): 'Deutsch als Fremdsprache', Lesson 4, Auf Zimmersuche, Aufgabe: Bilden Sie Reihen wie: *waschen, Wäsche waschen, Waschmaschine.*
'Efficient German', Lesson 8, Student sucht Zimmer, Exercise: Form sentences of the following pattern: *Er entschuldigt sich bei der alten Frau.*

There are no models in the second extract either. It too is related to the topic of the student looking for 'digs', but within the lesson context of neighbouring substitution drills it is intended to elicit appropriate forms of reflexive verbs, which illustrates drastically old-fashioned course design based on formal rather than discourse features.

General Versus LSP Teaching

Next we must look at the problem of whether and how certain categories of texts correlate with certain skills which we want our learners to acquire. We must remember to define these not in terms of phonological, grammatical and lexical items, but in terms of text types determined by situation, intention and subject matter. Our text selection must be guided not only by these communicative aims, but also the proficiency level and didactic experience of our learners. If our course is aimed at increasing reading or listening comprehension, then we must concentrate on developing the techniques of global scanning and close reading, if our aim is the production of continuous prose, we must try to show the learner how to compose a coherent text. In both cases the selection of material should be based on content and purpose rather than formal criteria. We would not, for instance, rule out a text just because it is in list form (a football-league table or a train time-table can be of vital interest to the learner), but we might well rule out certain

genres (like a formal letter of invitation, or a political speech) because they would not figure prominently in the pupil's experience.

There are several useful guides on how to exploit literary and non-literary texts in the classroom [cf. Rinke 1975]; for more general purposes I submit to you the notion of the 'parallel text'. In closely related languages such as German and English, each with well-developed language varieties for the whole spectrum of our communicative needs, it is often possible to find matching samples from two respective registers in the two languages, e.g. seed packets, railway tickets, mail-order catalogues, pop songs, business letters, and of course a literary work such as a poem and its translation equivalent.

Several branches of descriptive and applied linguistics merge when it comes to characterise the special features of technical language, or the 'registers' of particular universes of discourse, as I have shown with a colleague in a little anthology of writings on the problem of language variety [Butler and Hartmann 1976]. But for teaching a foreign language course for practitioners of a certain discipline we need not only a description of the discourse features of the field, but also a specification of the didactic needs of the learner group.

The naive approach to the problem is to offer a general language course first and later supplement it with the reading or translating of texts which are often chosen not by the experts in the discipline in question, but by the language teacher. At best these materials are accompanied by a specialised dictionary or a frequency list. (There is a useful series of such computerised word counts in German from a number of fields, edited by Henk J. Siliakus of Adelaide University.) The next-best solution is a joint subject-language course, as are now available at degree level in such technologically and business-oriented universities as Bath, Liège, and Linköping.

However, most people don't want to be bothered with such elaborate schemes. They would prefer a short, intensive course which would give them a reading knowledge just in their own narrow specialisation. I know of a couple of empirical studies which confirm that more people would consult foreign-language sources in their own disciplines if they had a reading knowledge in those languages, or at least the assistance of a 'rough oral' translation service. This need has prompted a number of research projects into the properties of scientific discourse, some with and some without an educational aim. Most of these studies have ended up with the realisation that specific registers are not uniform within themselves, but can be subdivided into sub-registers. Table (D) illustrates some of these in the two fields of politics and medicine. (Certainly for English and German, the languages of politics and medicine are among the most frequently analysed, although we are still far from a comprehensive description of either.)

(D)

LSP - 2 Case Studies:	Politics	Medicine
theoretical discourse	political science (textbooks)	medical science (textbooks)
workshop jargon	debate (minutes)	consultation (casenotes)
documentation	civil service (reports), legislation	health service (reports), prescription
public relations	propaganda (speech)	treatment (interview)

In many of these disciplines we can assume at least three or four layers or sub-registers· the workshop jargon of the practitioners when they communicate among themselves, the public relations language they use in dealings with outsiders, the written papers they produce in their transactions with the authorities or their clientele, and finally the theoretical discourse of concept-formation and teaching their subject to newcomers. The specialised language courses that have been developed on the basis of serious research reflect some of these distinctions, such as the Japanese reading course produced at Sheffield, the Russian course for social science students at Birmingham, the Nottingham German course for chemistry students, and the English study skills package for overseas doctors developed at Lancaster. There are many more less ambitious materials around, often produced ad-hoc for a particular group within an intensive framework, but they are all in principle subject to the general demands that I have made.

Translation in Language Teaching

There is one practice in foreign language teaching which has always respected the value of complete discourse: I am referring to the time-honoured activity of textual translation. This is a subject fraught with much dogma and misunderstanding, so I will try to get the different views into perspective by looking briefly at some of the main trends in language teaching methodology since about 1900.

Roughly speaking, we can classify these different orientations into 5 stages which I will call

(1) the classical model,

(2) the reform movement,

(3) the audio-lingual method,

(4) the cognitive code, and

(5) the eclectic approach.

The 'classical model' is associated with the way that ancient languages used to be taught before 1900, through the so-called grammar-translation method. The outlook was usually historical and the text-basis literary. It was unthinkable, for example, to use any material that deviated from the conventional literary standard (the notion of a literary norm from which all other usages such as dialectal and colloquial speech deviated is a product of that time). The justification of translation lies not so much in the possibility of introducing genuine material from the target language into the classroom, but rather in the belief that translation brings out comparatively the differences between the mother tongue and the foreign language. Today the grammar-translation method continues to a surprising extent in advanced language courses in higher education, chiefly as a means of exposing students to the whole range of stylistic variation in literary and (to a limited degree) non-literary texts [cf. Healey 1967].

As a violent reaction to the classical model, the so-called 'reform movement' or direct method has advocated almost the opposite viewpoint since about the turn of the century. The outlook is deliberately anti-historical, with a concentration on the spoken forms of the contemporary language and the conviction that phonetics can provide a more suitable basis than literary criticism. As the aim is complete immersion in the language (as far as that was possible in the early years of the 20th century with restricted facilities of travel and technology), translation tends to be regarded as a hindrance rather than a help to develop natural speech. The reform movement included practical innovators like Berlitz and Gouin, but also philologists and phoneticians like Jespersen, Viëtor and Passy. Occasionally, wise men like Henry Sweet (of Henry Higgins fame) saw the dangers of excessive dogmatism either way. Addressing himself to the language teachers of our grandparents, he wrote the following words in his book *The Practical Study of Languages:*

> *Thinking in the language implies that each idea is associated directly with its expression in the foreign language instead of being associated first with the native expression, which is then translated into the foreign language. This had led many into the fallacy that if we were only to get rid of translation in teaching a foreign language, substituting pictures or gestures, we should get rid of the cross associations of our own language. But these cross-associations are independent of translation. They arise simply from the fact that each idea that comes into our minds instantly suggests the native expression of it, whether the words are uttered or not: and however strongly we may stamp the foreign expression on our memories, the native one will always be stronger.* [1899:198]

The next step is relatively short; it leads us from the direct method of the European reformers to the audio-lingual method of the American applied linguists. The aim is still mastery of the spoken language (which is given a primary status

over the written mode), but the outlook and the techniques are different. Various army courses had successfully experimented with intensive classes and native-speaker informants, realising for the first time the idea of direct access to natural discourse, behavioural psychology had provided the idea of programmed learning, and electronic engineering had supplied the language laboratory. One of the features that associated the audio-lingual method with the descriptive linguistics of the time was a new 'contrastive' or 'differential' orientation which was advocated by a pupil of Bloomfield's, Robert Lado. Lado combined his experience in teaching English to speakers of other languages with the firm belief that structural linguistics can be used in the preparation of more effective teaching materials on the basis of a 'scientific' parallel description of the native language of the learner and the target language. In his famous book (often quoted but rarely read) *Linguistics across Cultures* he said explicitly that "textbooks should be graded as to grammatical structure, pronunciation, vocabulary, and cultural content" [1957:3], taking into account that the learner will find those elements that are similar to his native language simple, but that he will have difficultues with those elements that are different. We know now that this was much too bold a claim; we know on the basis of empirical error analysis that learners have plenty of difficulties and commit many errors which are *not* caused by differences due to structural contrast between the two languages; in fact the very idea of mother-tongue interference (which is at the heart of the predictive contrastive analysis hypothesis) needs to be looked into with great care.

Another thing we know now is that teaching materials should not be graded by linguistic units but by discourse requirements, and this is where we come back to texts and the uses of translation. It strikes us as strange today that at the same time as Lado was establishing links between contrastive linguistics and the psychology of interference, the Canadian Jean-Paul Vinay put forward his radical alternative of 'comparative stylistics' in which he argued that far from creating interference, translation could actually be used to point to exactly those differences and overlaps between the textual conventions of the two languages that were supposed to make learning difficult. According to Vinay and Darbelnet [1958] the difficulties lie in the different formal organisation of parallel texts. Errors in translation arise because we naively assume that a situationally equivalent text must also have formal correspondences. If we translate word-for-word rather than text-by-text, it is no wonder that we produce those hilarious blunders which are collected in lists of 'faux amis'. But Vinay's voice in the wilderness was not heard, and the audio-lingual view prevailed that translation produced interference and therefore must be avoided [cf. Huebener 1965].

The next orientation after the classical model, the reform movement, and the audio-lingual method was the so-called 'cognitive code' view which developed in opposition to behavioural psychology and some of the naive assumptions of post-Bloomfieldian contrastive linguistics. Noam Chomsky and his followers in transformational-generative grammar certainly helped to make the pendulum swing back

to considerations of what the language learner might actually be doing, but in practice had very little impact on language teaching methodology. From within applied linguistics, however, did come the recognition that an analysis of the errors which a language learner makes might assist our understanding of how learning itself progresses. Error analysis has a fairly long if somewhat dingy tradition, but in the late 'sixties it suddenly became a respectable academic activity. Pit Corder was one of the first to criticise the view that errors were nothing but an inconvenient sign that a particular drill had been ineffective. Corder stresses the alternative view which

> *would suggest that the making of errors is an inevitable and indeed necessary part of the learning process. The 'correction' of error provides precisely the sort of negative evidence which is necessary to discovery of the correct concept or rule.* [1971:158]

And so translation is back again as a way of charting the trial-and-error path of the learner, more perhaps as an indirect measuring device than a direct teaching technique.

Finally we come to the so-called 'eclectic' orientation which is the approach that most enlightened language teaching methodologists have been advocating for the last decade or so. The eclectic approach realises that there is no *one* correct method, but several which we must select and combine, depending what the specific objectives of the learner might be. The overall aim of all foreign language teaching must be the creation of bilinguals. The degree of bilingualism achieved will depend on motivation, selection of material and a host of other factors. Paul Christophersen, himself bilingually proficient to a remarkable degree, says that "perfection in a language, first or second, is not something clear-cut and absolute", and that, "given the will, the opportunity and the right approach, there is no limit to the degree of proficiency that may be achieved in a second-learnt language" [1973:53 and 70]. In an eclectic framework, translation may or may not play a role, according to what the learners want to do and what the teacher can provide [cf. Ingram 1976].

Fortunately, then, the dogmatic fronts are no longer as hard as they used to be, and we see a little more clearly the arguments for and against translation in the more flexible spirit of contrastive textology. We recognise that translating is a very complex operation which requires knowledge and skills that cannot be taken for granted in the earlier stages of a language course. On the other hand, because translation can rely on an almost unbroken teaching tradition and can bring genuine and topical discourse into the learning situation, it tends to enjoy a high prestige in the more advanced stages of language courses.

If the text is (as I have suggested) the appropriate unit of discourse, then graphology, phonology, grammar and lexicology must be means to its realisation rather than ends in themselves. Words do not have isolated meanings, but always function in a textual context. If we want to improve our teaching materials, we

must try to find out what the textual conventions and equivalents are in the corresponding language varieties which we want to impart. The selection, analysis and presentation of parallel texts can often go a long way towards this aim.

One type of exercise that I have experimented with is the production of a 'free' translation in the form of a stylistic re-casting of a text in the conventions of the corresponding register of the other language. With a group of first-year German honours students I looked at a videotape of a German TV programme, a parody of a typical family quiz show, and then, listening to the sound track on audio-tape in the language laboratory, the students paraphrased it in English, with all the trappings of a similar British show in mind. This is translation with a purpose, it emphasises textual rather than literal equivalence, and develops skills of comprehension and composition that traditional prose classes tend to blunt.

We began with a paradox, and we end with a paradox which I want to pose as a question: Isn't it true that in a sense there are more similarities between truly parallel texts of different languages than between texts of different registers of one and the same language? This would explain the experience that we seem to comprehend texts in our own field of specialisation in another language, while we have great difficulty in adjusting to the conventions of a different field in our mother tongue.

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